



## Teachers' Desk Reference: Practical Information for Pennsylvania's Teachers

# Using Instructional Time Effectively

Teachers often lament that there is "so much to do in so little time." As a teacher, you are charged with one of the most important tasks in the country – educating America's youth. Many teachers have only five to six hours per school day to accomplish this daunting task. How effectively those hours are used varies from district to district, school to school, and even classroom to classroom.

### Time and the School Day

All time is not equal. There is the time during which students are available to you, the time that is allocated for instruction, the time during which students are engaged in learning tasks, and finally the time during which students are experiencing success.

**Available time** is the amount of time from the morning bell to the closing bell of the day. Because of the variety of activities that take place in a school building, only a portion of available time is devoted to learning. Activities such as lunch, homeroom, and recess are also part of the school day.

Research\* shows that approximately 79 percent of available time is allocated for instruction in the content areas. In a six hour school day,

you have approximately five hours of **allocated time** for instruction, and lose almost one hour for noninstructional activities.

During allocated time for instruction, students are engaged in learning tasks an average of 42 percent of the time. **Engaged time** – the amount of time students are actively involved in learning – is only two and one-half hours a day.

Efficient and effective use of allocated and engaged time can significantly increase the amount of time that students experience successful academic learning.

Finally, during that engaged time, students need to experience success with learning activities. The average amount of **time students experience success** during engaged time is 17 percent. This means that without good use of time, students may experience successful academic learning for about 45 minutes in a school day! Using instructional time effectively can change this!

### Take Control of What You Can Control

As a teacher, you do not have control over the available time as this is established by the school board. You also have very little control over how much time is allocated for instruction. What you can control is how you use that allocated time. Efficient and effective use of allocated and engaged time can significantly increase the amount of time that students experience successful academic learning.

## Effective Use of Time

While it is possible that at some point in the future the number of school days and hours in each school day may increase, right now you need to make sure the time you do have is used in the most effective ways. A few changes can help to reduce the amount of "down" time in your classroom and increase the amount of time that students are learning successfully.

- Teach from bell-to-bell. There is often much time lost at the beginning of the period waiting to get started. Consider writing a task on the board so that students can begin work immediately. Also, plan activities following completion of tests and quizzes. This time could be used to introduce what is coming next. If the class is beginning a new unit, use the time to talk with students to assess prior knowledge about the new topic. Give students an opportunity to learn about the new topic.
- Manage your classroom efficiently by establishing and teaching procedures to ensure that all of your students know:
  - ▶ Where to locate supplies that are needed
  - ▶ How, where, and when to turn in homework
  - ▶ To be seated before the bell rings
  - ▶ How to transition from one activity to another
  - ▶ What to do when work is completed

The more aware your students are of the classroom procedures, the less time you will

spend telling and retelling students what to do.

- Have all necessary materials ready at the beginning of the lesson. This includes your textbook, worksheets, pens or markers, and any tools such as calculators or rulers that students may need. Lack of organization takes precious minutes from allocated time.
- Actively engage students in the learning process. Engage your students by having them:
  - ▶ Respond chorally
  - ▶ Use response cards
  - ▶ Make choices
  - ▶ Share with their neighbor

Students who are engaged are less likely to be disruptive. Active engagement also provides a quick way to assess whether your students are learning and understanding.

- Use informal and formal assessment procedures frequently to check for understanding. If the class understands a concept, move on rather than having them complete work that repeatedly demonstrates their understanding.

Using strategies such as those listed above will add valuable minutes to your day, resulting in more time for your students to learn.

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\*Adapted from Hofmeister, A., & Lubke, M. (1990). *Research into practice: Implementing effective teaching practices*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

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